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SUBJECT: THAILAND: MFA BRIEFS ON OIC DELEGATION VISIT TO  
REVIEW SOUTHERN VIOLENCE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On June 9, the Foreign Ministry (MFA) briefed the Diplomatic Corps regarding the ongoing visit of a delegation from the Organization of The Islamic Conference (OIC) looking into the Tak Bai incident and unrest in southern Thailand. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) emphasized the cooperative and overall positive tone of the visit and in a joint press statement (faxed to EAP/BCLTV), the OIC visitors appeared to agree. However, some Thais are concerned that the OIC's visit will result in unfavorable comment at the next OIC meeting and bring further unwanted attention from the Muslim world to the problem in the South. END SUMMARY

2. (U) On June 9 the MFA briefed the Diplomatic Corps regarding the ongoing visit of a delegation from the OIC to Thailand. The OIC delegation, led by former Egyptian diplomat Sayed El-Masry, is on a fact finding mission from June 2-13 to look into the ongoing unrest in the Muslim majority provinces of far southern Thailand. MFA Permanent Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn and El-Masry had issued a

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joint statement to the press on June 7 which highlighted the cooperative and positive atmosphere surrounding the visit. The MFA briefing, given by Deputy Perm Sec Pisan Manawapat, mirrored the content of the press statement, with Pisan emphasizing that the delegation had been granted the full cooperation of the RTG and had met freely with a wide range of people concerned with the southern situation -- including the families of Muslim victims of the violence.

3. (U) Pisan recalled that the RTG invitation to the OIC to visit Thailand followed an OIC statement issued in February, 2005 which was critical of the RTG's handling of the situation in southern Thailand. Pisan said that statement, and previous reports by the OIC, had been unfairly critical of the RTG's handling of southern violence and did not reflect the true nature of the situation. Pisan said that the OIC delegation had promised to replace all previous reports by their organization about Thailand with the report generated during this visit. Pisan claimed the new OIC report would show that conditions for Thailand's Muslims are "very different from what is negatively portrayed in the media." Pisan said the delegation understood that the unrest in the South "does not involve religious conflict." However, not all Thai officials have been so optimistic that the report will vindicate the RTG's handling of the conflict. Deputy Prime Minister Chitchai Wannasathit told the media that, "whether they say they understand now, but express negative opinions later, is out of our hands."

4. (U) Pisan acknowledged that the delegation had expressed concern over excessive force used by Thai security forces -- notably during the October 25, 2004 Tak Bai incident which resulted in the deaths of over 80 Muslim protesters -- and had expressed disappointment over the lenient punishment given to the responsible military officers. Pisan said the RTG had expressed its regret for this and other "national tragedies" -- and admitted that "grave mistakes" had been made -- but hoped that the OIC would see that the RTG is seriously working on long-term solutions to the conflict.

5. (SBU) COMMENT: At the end of the briefing, Pisan noted that Foreign Minister Kantathi is considering attending the next OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting as an observer and said that Kantathi has been working the phones with OIC member Foreign Ministers to explain the situation in the South. While the Thais are hopeful that their openness to the OIC will win points with the Muslim world, they are clearly worried that the visit could have the opposite effect and serve to further highlight the conflict in southern Thailand, drawing the attention of the larger Muslim world. END COMMENT

6. (U) The text of the MFA-OIC joint press statement has been faxed to EAP/BCLTV.  
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